KING of the BLACK ISLES

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J. U. Nicolson

WASHINGTON BOOK CO.
Successor to
COVICI-McGEE CO.
CHICAGO
1925

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COVICI-McGEE CO.
CHICAGO

First Printing, February 15, 1924
Second Printing, February 21, 1924
Third Printing, February 28, 1924
Fourth Printing, March 5, 1924
Fifth Printing, May 20, 1924
Sixth Printing, April 6, 1925

W. F. HALL PRINTING CO.
CHICAGO

Before the Curtain

SOME two years ago in the *Line o' Type* column of the CHICAGO TRIBUNE, conducted by Richard Henry Little, occurred one of those sudden flurries of excitement that are the life of column conducting. There appeared a poem, "most musical, most melancholy," over the magical pseudonym "The King of the Black Isles." Response to the new voice was immediate and general. The conductor was showered with letters requesting more verse from this poet potentate, which, in due course, was vouchsafed. Since then "The King's" success has been confirmed, and not only in his first demesne but in other Chicago columns. In *Hit or Miss* on the CHICAGO DAILY NEWS and in *Pillar to Post* on the CHICAGO EVENING POST his poems have been waited for, welcomed, clipped and pasted into scrapbooks. In mediums where good verse is no rarity his success has been conspicuous.

The appeal of J. U. Nicolson—behold "The King of the Black Isles" unmasked!—is an ancient magic. Musical before anything else, his masters are the singing poets from Villon to Swinburne. His escape from our perturbed and petty present lies most often in the pomps and splendors of the past. Even in love he is not too immediate. It is the still glowing embers of passion that

he prefers to contemplate wistfully, yet with no lack of warmth when all is said. In this romantic field we can think of no American poet that parallels Nicolson at this moment. For putting life and lure into the past, he stands among current poets as a Sabatini among novelists.

Much could be said of the music of these poems, the result of no ordinary skill with metres. But that is beside the point of this preface, which we write as a column editor to attest the very unusual success Mr. Nicolson has scored with column readers. Demanded by many, we count on this collection to make the author still more new friends outside the column circle.

KEITH PRESTON.

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KING OF THE BLACK ISLES

TO——

Unto the end and beyond the end!
For out of my dust a rose shall grow
And out of my heart a wind shall go
To carry the scent of the rose to you,
Till you, too, into the dust descend
To lie beside me the long night through.

IF

If I should make a song for you,
  What would you do with it?
Sing it to a new lover
  Or only sigh and sit? . . .

The wind among the maple trees,
  Murmuring in your hair,
Is older than a melody
  Of any lute player.

And rain upon a quiet beach,
  Droning over the sand,
Can tell of kings in Avalon
  And queens in Samarcand. . . .

If I should make a song for you,
  What would you have me sing?
Semiramis or the crack o' dawn
  Or a posy for a ring?

A LADY LIVED IN LESBOS

A lady lived in Lesbos a weary time ago;
So many years have overpassed it's little we can know;
So many wars have worn away, with Gods and creeds
and kings,
It's little we remember now of older, happier things.

For men go up and down the land, under and over the
seas
(A lady lived in Lesbos, but what is that to these?)
And men sit watching, night by night, how Mars the
planet spins
And women sit and gossip over marriages and sins.

We have forgotten beauty and all our Gods are good,
And little we remember now the dryads and the wood,
And only old philosophers and foolish dreamers know
What lady lived in Lesbos a weary time ago.

THE STREETS OF HELL

When I go down the streets of Hell,
Go swaggering down the streets of Hell,
  Then I shall see the great ones pass
    In gorgeous golden cars—
Bonaparte and Prester John
And Charlemagne and Genghis Khan
  And all the glorious kings—alas!—
    That passed beneath the stars.

And only on the streets of Hell,
The murky, turbulent streets of Hell,
  Shall I behold the blood-red curls
    Of slain Semiramis,
Pompadour and the priceless tear
That Arthur loved as Guinevere
  And all the wonderful wanton girls
    That damned a king with a kiss.

IN PASSING

There was a road a-winding, a little road a-winding,
And over hills and under hills it led me far away,
Past barley fields and hamlets and busy mills a-grinding,
And came upon a city at the closing of the day—
The burnished roofs were blinding at the closing of the day.

There was a woman weaving, a silent woman weaving,
She sat within a shop door and she raised her eyes to mine,
And suddenly the clamor was hushed beyond believing
And all the air was pleasant for the smell of eglantine
And all her face was grieving for the smell of eglantine.

It was the time when roses, when fettered, redolent roses
Are shaken by the freedom of some passionate nightingale
That wantons from a hillside and through a garden's closes,
Singing of Mytilene or a lovely Theban vale—
Where Itylus reposes in a lovely Theban vale.

We two are long in sunder, forever now in sunder,
For many roads of many lands have led me far away,
But always I shall fancy, or over hills or under,
I see a silent woman at the closing of the day—
What does she weave, I wonder, at the closing of the day?

TO A PRETTY WOMAN

You are a bugle blown for a weary bivouac;
  You are the splendor of blood on burnished blades,
You are the west wind over a waste of sedges;
  And you are a teak-wood cabinet filled with jades.

You are a topaz burned alone in a casket;
  You are a glass to be drained and flung to the floor;
You are a reed that one might fashion for music;
  You are a woman and you are nothing more.

But in your eyes are the flames that flow in an opal;
  Your mouth is hot as a roseleaf crushed from a rose;
You are the lie and the lure of all that is beauty . . .
  And how I shall ever be quit of you now—God knows!

STRING STARS FOR PEARLS

String stars for pearls on a ribbon of whim
  And fling it about her shoulders,
Carve cups from coral and crust each brim
  Till the whole gem smokes and smolders;
Bring gold for beating in thick bright rings
  And honey from hearts of clover:
But love will long for the absent things,
  Ever the old earth over.

Go, ride the world in a glory of wars
  And startle the Gods to wonder;
Break men to follow triumphant cars
  With a rose-paved road thereunder;
Pile stone on stone for the bruit of a name
  When a thousand years dissever:
But love will lean to a smaller flame
  Forever and forever.

RECONCILIATION

When I am dead and deep in dust,
  So you but plant a rose-tree there,
Get back to labor and to lust
  And weep no more nor greatly care.

The quick they have so much to learn,
  The dead they have so much to do,
If but your roses bloom and burn,
  There shall be peace between us two.

SONG FOR ADVANCING AGE

We'll flush our youth with wine no more nor pour the old libations,
Our pleasant Gods and beautiful have all been overthrown
And those that reign are bitter Gods raised up by savage nations
That flung their heavy swords across the goods we called our own.

'Tis true the evil tribes will pass and true the evil rabble
Will fawn at Caesar's chariot wheels for gold and cakes and games,
But Greece hath only lechery to lend the Roman Babel
And all the conquered Orient hath only creeds and shames.

Oh, beat your breasts and tear your hair and call for Coriolanus,
The empty heavens answer not, the winds blow on before,
And moth and rust creep in behind the close-barred gates of Janus—
And there'll be those to laugh again, but we'll be young no more!

FUTILITY OF SINGING

In rain and wind I made a song of her,
  A little sweet sad song for ease of pain,
Full of blown gold and silver, lovelier
  Than April's dancing in the wind and rain.

I made a song of her upon the sands
  While yet the darkening west was all ablaze,
Singing her face, from many ways and lands,
  Beyond the seas through many lands and ways.

And then I made a song of her, at last,
  Wherein were only tenderness and rest
And dreams long time remembered of the past
  And dusk of hair let down upon her breast.

And all my songs are music, all my songs
  Are music as of harp and dulcimer,
But I can strike no chord wherein belongs
  The melody of the mystery of her.

A WANDER SONG

Emerald seas and seas of agate wandering under the sky,
And I would loiter the world around or ever I come to die—
Or ever I come to die, Love, and to say farewell to you—
With only a cook and a cabin boy and a lazy Lascar crew.

They've amber sands in the Coral Isles and little or no restraint
And God has painted the misty hills as only God can paint;
As only God can paint, Love, where the copra schooners ply
Through emerald seas and seas of agate wandering under the sky.

A bulbul sobs in a citron-tree that blooms in Samarcand
And the song of a Sufi haunts the night for those who understand,
For those who understand, Love, and the hidden lutes reply,
And I would loiter the world around or ever I come to die.

Oh, I would barter my goods away and I would leave mine ease
To follow the gull and the albatross in the winds that walk the seas,
In the winds that walk the seas, Love, with a lazy Lascar crew,
Or ever I come to die, Love, and to say farewell to you.

OF MIST AND AIR

The Gods are old and sad and wise,
  Since they were made by aged men
For whom desire in woman's eyes
  And madness would not come again.
The Gods are cold and grave and stern,
  Wrought marvelously of mist and air—
Though roses bloom and roses burn
  Sweet as a woman's hair!

Young lips will fasten hard on lips,
  Young hearts will brave through
    turbulent seas;
Song and the ways of tall swift ships
  And wild swift words are dear to these.
Vanity, vanity! All things pass,
  Lost in the wars of wind and wave—
And who hath seen beneath the grass
  A God's hand reached to save?

Oh, choice of follies! Give me now
  To swagger through romantic streets
As he that paints Aspasia's brow
  On every laughing wench he meets!
Give me my bubbling veins again,
  May's madness and May's mystery,
And all the Gods of all old men
  May part and cease to be!

ROMANCE

There was a queen in Nineveh
  And there were queens in Tyre
And Egypt had a fair queen
  As ever men desire.

Upon her throne in Camelot
  Sat burning Guinevere,
And Eleanor in Aquitaine
  With an opal on her ear

These women are but drifting dust,
  And who is there to say
That all their loveliness and lust
  Bother men today?

But I must make a little song
  And make it fair and sweet,
Because a wanton smiled at me
  A-walking down the street.

ONE DAY

As I went out through Michigan, went motoring out through Michigan,
Where deep the dark Muskegon ran to seek its western sea,
I heard a song that filled the dawn, the radiant, rampant, golden dawn—
"Into the west my lad has gone, who will remember me?"
Oh, blue the lakes of Michigan, blue as the skies of Michigan,
And blue were the eyes of Marianne who sang that lover's lay,
Yellow as corn her blowing hair (the sun was a glory on her hair)
And ruddy her lips when, halting there, I kissed the song away.
I know the woods of Michigan and all the hills of Michigan,
And never shall I forget that Pan still pipes a pagan 'ay
And never shall I forget the wind (the grass of the upland knows the wind),
Luring the lazy clouds of Ind over the world away.
But red were the lakes of Michigan, red as the skies of Michigan,
And red were the eyes of Marianne who wept where none could see
When I drove into the sunset glow, the windy, weltering, western glow,
And, oh, the burden of pride, and oh, the ache of a dream in me!

SHALL SOMEONE SING?

When bright with gold Cuchulain's brand
  Flung silver death to the breasts of men,
What braid, by strand and ruddier strand,
  Was dyed in the red dew falling then?
What queen of a misty realm or girl
  Of the Everliving by some lone sea
Wove her hands in a kindred curl
  And keened in the wan wind anxiously?

Who was the woman great with love
  That Sargon left at the Persian hills
For a gem set deep in gold whereof
  The song of a war-king throbs and thrills?
In a chamber painted with all delight,
  In a bower blushed with a rhythm of rose,
What princess wept alone in the night
  And wept in the dawn alone—who knows?

O fair young girls blown over with dust
  And blown like dust on the desert, now,
What kings have kissed you, livid with lust,
  Having gold on breast and delicate brow?
And O my girl that I kiss tonight,
  When the world has circled a thousand years
Shall someone sing of your dead delight
  And strike from a sounding string your tears?

MONODY

The hills are painted with glory,
  The seas are heavy with sound
And one may look on the wide sky
  The whole year round.

There is no end of beauty
  And never an end of song
And one may harbor a deep dream
  All life long.

And June comes over with roses
  And memories, one by one,
But the kiss we 'changed on a dim day—
  That is done.

FROM HAUNTED HALLS

If we should meet, my love and I,
  At our old garden gates, alone,
And see our Spanish castle lie
  A crumbling ruin, ivy-grown,
Would we go thence, my love and I,
  To some small cottage near a stream
Or—oft I ponder—would we sigh
  And part to mourn a shattered dream?

If we should meet, my love and I,
  And stand without the broken door,
Well might we fear what now must lie
  Where happiness was housed of yore.
And would we dare, my love and I,
  Cover a meaner hearth and walls
With arras of a day gone by
  And trophies torn from haunted halls?

THE KING OF THE BLACK ISLES

Pale in the silver armor of its dreams,
The soul loves not to wake within the night
Where, haply, but one watchful candle gleams
Between what threatening shadows dare the light,
But, rather, strives with all it may of might
To hold the magic battlements of sleep
Which look upon wide valleys, rich and bright,
And happy homes and herds and rivers deep
And fountains of desire from which men wake and weep.

To wake and weep—that, surely, is a thing
Which all men suffer under the old stars,
Since all men born are born to sorrowing
In quiet days, remembering splendid wars,
Though woman's eyes become swift avatars
Flamed marvelously across mysterious ways
And summer sighs among the deodars
With perfume of a passion that betrays,
Low on a secret bed, her rose-rapt nights and days.

Bound in the silken scents of night, I slept
Upon a cloud of melody that rose
From aloes and from almond trees and swept
Over the couch, not breaking my repose,
But flinging on my dream such mist as flows
From censers hung along the walls of Heaven

And drugs us out of time and space and blows
Infinity within our ken and even
That ecstasy of peace to which the Gods are given.

Was it some bulbul fainter than the rest,
Luring my heart to follow his wild throat,
That stilled the burdened pulses in my breast
With loss of louder music, note by note?
Was it that streaming loveliness remote,
Like opals poured from pitchers of deep glass,
Which, ending in a sudden silence, smote
Hard on my ear as clangor of fierce brass?
Ah, harder in the dark for beauty that must pass!

Ah, no! It was the sound of whispering
Where slaves within the chamber chanted shame,
Whimpering out of dread that I the king
Might wake before a woman turned and came
Unto her bed and mine . . . ah, she whose name
My young pride blazoned over ancient walls
What time I brought her—feather of my fame!—
To share my throne and fill my fathers' halls
With laughter clear as dryads' at sylvan waterfalls.

For sometime I was king of these Black Isles,
Crowned gloriously with honor and with love.
My realm was bounded by unmeasured miles,
My gold was as the unnumbered sands thereof;
Before my throne all men bowed down, above
Reigned the sweet voice of my soul's ortolan
So trusted as one trusts a nesting dove . . .

How could I dream she played the courtezan?
Yet see me what I am—half marble and half man!

They wantoned in the garden. On his breast
Her bosom, all white lilies on black fur,
Moved and her mouth moved, sobbing without rest
For thirst of love that would not ease in her.
She drank down kisses as the wine-bibber
Drinks from long cups and ever cries out "More!"
Till I, who stood with trembling scimiter,
Marveled and mused and for a time forebore
To deal them death, for shame of being their auditor.

I know not whence it is, but in wild love
There is a kind of grandeur, as if then
The soul flings off all flesh and fear thereof,
Striding out naked in the sight of men,
Who pause and stand a little in awe, as when
They look on courage moving with calm breath
And high, stern heart upon some denizen
Of darkness and the doubtful caves of death,
Serene of faith in honor and in honor's faith.

What angel or what evil unknown djinn,
Ranging from midmost regions of the air,
Found out her woman's heart to wander in
And ruin us with reign of madness there?
Could not her eyes foresee their own despair?
Was she not privy to what dangers lay
But in a whisper, in a slave's wan stare,
When all the palace marked her face betray

A night's fierce fires of love yet smoldering through the
day?

Ah, God, she was delightful unto me!
Her breasts were fashioned for kissing all night long;
Smoother than amber burnished by the sea,
The arches of her feet were smooth and strong;
Her hair was woven of silken flame and song;
Her mouth more bruised for honey than honeycomb;
And on her brows lay no more shadow of wrong
Than on the sails of laden ships blown home,
Far out of spice-rapt lands, on waves flung white with
foam.

Exquisite in my garden of dead kings,
Her beauty burned along some fountain's brim
Like fire of gems in heavy golden rings,
Like rubies in a God's eyes, hallowing him;
Her curious garments whispered, limb to limb,
How all that body bore them in proud grace
Or in the glade of tamarinds, deep and dim,
Or loitering on the dusty market-place—
Even through a woman's veils, men marked the royal
race.

I made a wondrous palace on this wise:
The floors wrought well of onyx and sweet wood,
The walls of jasper, and I bade devise
High, delicate roofs that pictured all things good;
One room was saffron and one red like blood
And every room was entered through glad gold;

And pleasant for light breezes, though day stood
Blazing his wrath against the nether cold,
The courts about those halls murmured how long waves
rolled.

Damascus sent us diamonds; from the North
Came caravans with sapphires; caravans
Across the sands of Syria issued forth
With silks and silver and spikenard; in sedans,
Litters of leopards; jade and amber fans;
Soft skins of lambs and brilliant skins of birds;
And, silent, but with sunnier soul than man's,
Came apes from watching tropic moons like curds
Churned in the vats of time by Gods too wise for words.

Beauty being dead, what shall be said of her
More than men say of dead men who were just?
"One hour he had for music and for myrrh
Or even within the worm-worn grave was thrust,
One hour for labor and a little lust
Before time quenched his passion in decay."
And who would seek to stir the unheeding dust?
And who would have one further word to say?
Ere he make end of saying, he shall be borne away.

Now, therefore, it may well be said that bliss
And all high beauty are no more to us
Than deep remembrance of a dead rose is
Which, in dead days, a live thing tremulous,
Burned in the hair of one made glorious
With kisses sown thick over brows and breast,

For as all passion passes, even thus
Romance, with velvet fingers of unrest,
Paints in the chrome of tears our lost loves loveliest.

It is as if one riding to the night
Looks back at some tall city and forgets
The fetid ways, the squalor and the sight
Of base men bowed to brutal epithets
In watching those far towers and minarets
Springing to golden domes magnificent
With banners billowing on wide parapets,
While rings from battlement and battlement
The clang of trumpets blown for some young king's ascent.

Oh, then, farewell forever all desire!
Farewell delight! And radiant reign farewell!
I see the red west embered on the pyre
Of day's long glory, slain by Azrael
Who walks in plumes, a dusky sentinel,
Down all the lingering vistas of the light
With emblems of his empery—asphodel
And silver—and there closes on my sight
The gloom of wings and all the mystery of night.

IN BABYLON, IN BABYLON

In Babylon, in Babylon
They made a harlot queen,
And all the gold of all the world
Was gathered there, I ween;
And love was always young, there,
And beauty always gay
Upon the streets of Babylon,
Before they passed away.

In Babylon, in Babylon
It was a queen's delight
To seek along the dark ways
For lovers in the night;
And men they came in armor
And men they came in skins
To eat the meats of Babylon
And sip the wine of sins.

In Babylon, in Babylon,
The walls are fallen down
And gone are all the princes
And merchants of the town;
The little laughing ladies
And lords of bitter wars
In all the halls of Babylon
Are quiet as the stars.

NEED YOU KNOW?

I have come from Eastern Inds
  In a vessel flown like fire
Joyously on streaming winds
  To your arms of my desire
I have brought you rugs and rings,
  Amber combs and Gods to kiss,
Pearls and myriad painted things—
  Ask no more than this!

On your body you shall wear
  Silks and gold of Samarcand—
Silks and gold—and in your hair
  Perfume out of Tartar-land.
I am come with arms of flame
  Where I loved in younger years—
Need you know what secret shame
  Drinks my secret tears?

THEN COMETH ATROPOS

When first I went to London
  My heart and hopes were high,
And there was not in all the town
  A man so proud as I;
And Beauty smiled upon me
  And Wealth did not ignore,
When first I went to London
  And called at Fortune's door.

When next I went to London
  I rode as kings may ride,
So there was not in all the land
  A greater man beside;
And Beauty bowed before me
  And Wealth could but implore,
When next I went to London
  And mused at Fortune's door.

When last I went to London
  With darkness on mine eyes,
Oh, there was not in all the world
  A man more deeply wise;
Yet Beauty laughed and left me
  And Wealth stalked on before,
When last I went to London
  And fawned at Fortune's door

A DRINKING SONG

Gather ye, gather ye round!
Let winter blow over the chimney!
Gather ye, gather ye round!
Fill tankards and mugs to the brim, nay,
Here's health to the feeble and strength to the strong,
And life it is short and the grave it is long,
So drink while you can, sir, and sing me a song!
Come round, round, round!

Gather ye, gather ye round!
Here's cheer for your trouble and sorrow!
Gather ye, gather ye round!
The devil may care for tomorrow!
All ye that must labor for knight or for knave,
There's little to gain and there's little to save
And never a song nor a drink in the grave!
Come round, round, round!

SAILOR SONG

Let others break sod when the robins are nesting
And sow for the harvest in valley and plain,
My heart of a rover is wild to be breasting
The surge of the surf and the might of the main.
When the tang of the spring, like the sting of white spray,
Comes to lure me and call me and dare me away,
Oh, it's ho! for the ropes and the sails they'll be testing—
I'm off to the sea in the wind and the rain!

Let others sing songs of the joys of the byways,
The trysts in the gloaming, the lays of the lark,
Let others delight in the throngs on the highways,
The bustle and babble from dawn unto dark.
The droning of bees and the murmur of crowds
Are drowned in the hymn of the hum of the shrouds,
And it's ho! for a ship to go booming down my ways,
A sloop or a schooner, a brig or a bark.

Let others for wealth or for wisdom be sighing,
The world it is wide and the ways they are free,
And today is today but tomorrow means dying,
And what shall the money-bags matter to me?
Oh, it's ho and it's hey and it's hey and it's ho!
There are women and wine in the tavern, I know,
But it's ho! for the skies where the gray gulls are flying—
I'm over the hills to the ships and the sea!

SONG

The kings that fought for Helen
  Are gone like wraiths away,
And all their wars are done now
  And all their lusts, for aye;
But he that harped for Helen,
  His fingers strike and strum,
Though Helen's hands are dust now
  And Helen's lips are dumb.

And I dream dreams of Helen,
  As men shall dream for aye,
Till all the prayers are said then
  And all the Gods are gray,
For that the loves of Helen
  In so sweet words were sung
When Helen's grave was green then
  And Helen's fame was young.

I'LL RUN NO MORE

The moon is only a moon now
And the mist is only mist;
The lips of the roses on my brow
But kiss as they always kissed;
And arms of women of high degree,
Though heavy with gifts of gold,
Not always fetter the dreams of me,
For I am growing old.

I'll run no more in the fierce dawn
And I'll strike my harp no more.
The foolish lovers across the lawn
But stroll as they strolled of yore.
The tales of battle and might of men
And the wonderful songs were sung
Shall never be quite the same again—
Oh, God!——for I was young!

SONG TO BE SAID AT DAYBREAK

I cannot think of other things for thinking of desire
To burn a woman's brows and breast with kisses flown
with fire;
Nor all the books of all the East and western sages', too,
Can aught avail to comfort me while this is yet to do.

Beneath the lighted groins of night I sit and cannot
speak
Of gargoyles wrought in Gothic stone or griffins carved
in Greek,
But only of a woman's grace: among the stars I see
The bright and bitter beauty of a face that mocks at me.

Oh, I will be a falconer, a trainer just and wise,
And I will break my heart to hawk at bees and butterflies;
And let it fly at random check or clip on lawful wings,
I'll ride the world in hunting green and think of other
things!

LOVE IS A THIEF

Oh break my harp, when I am dead,
  And burn my songs along with me
And let no foolish prayers be said
  And no long wailing, bitterly,
But, rather, when a morning star
  Blazes above the gates of God,
Remember how no roses bar
  The ways you might have trod.

And when you walk where then we met,
  If, haply, you grow sad for me,
Forget that once we loved, forget
  My songs and sonnets, utterly!
And oh, for summer days and sweet
  Under the roses, while you live
Forbear the fragrance, overfleet,
  And, if you can, forgive!

TO COLUMBINE

You ask me for a song, but I
  Would rather kiss your lips again
Than sing the stars out, one by one,
  And name them, too, for men.

And I would rather kiss your throat
  And kiss your closed white eyelids up
Than have that gold by Helen's breast
  Once moulded for a cup.

You ask me for a song. Ah, Love,
  What bells unstruck can ever chime?
But ring me with a kiss and I
  Will break your heart with rhyme!

IF I REMEMBER

I think I shall not overmuch
  Be grieved, when I am old and gray,
For loss of kisses and the touch
  Of fingers on my face today;
I think I shall not care at all
  For lips or looks or any love
If only I can still recall
  The emptiness thereof.

The mouth of maiden or the mouth
  Of courtezan or wanton dame
Is always cruel as the South
  And always bitter as a flame.
I think that if I but recall
  How lips will tire that once have met,
I shall not ever care at all . . . . .
  But what if I forget?

BATHSHEBA

I have been summoned; I have seen the king;
And he hath granted all my long desire.
He lieth upon his bed of sorrowing
With lank and matted locks and mouth like mire;
And there one twangleth ever at a wire;
And round about are divers tongues to wag;
But cold he lieth for all the hovering fire
Of maiden Abishag.

God knoweth her fairer now than any of us
In even our good days gone! But what hath she?
The wreck and ruin of one once valorous
Who cannot break her vain virginity!
Oh, let her glean from wan eyes watery
Love's leavings and from stiffening, waxen lips,
An old man's kiss, enduring patiently
An old man's fingertips!

I wonder would she marvel, could she know
What I have known of David in the days
When forth he rode to battle, long ago,
In gold and crimson and with shield ablaze.
How thronged the press of people, mouthing praise!
How chariots thundered, car on glittering car,
With storms of stallions darkening down the ways
The king marked out for war!

It was no blinkard maunderer that came
Upon the house-tops in the evening light
While yet the day's wide window burned with flame
Poured gloriously along the hills of night;
The man that watched me make my body white
Stood strong athwart his kingdom and his pride
Recked not of God for sufferance nor his might
Of man for choice of bride!

He sent for me and took me. Glad with gold
His great hands broke that other's hold of me,
Howbeit Uriah's heart beat high and bold,
Nor would he fawn nor bend a warrior's knee,
But walked undaunted on his destiny——
Sometimes I wake at night and think of him,
A plain, brave man to merit honestly
The welcoming Seraphim.

And I remember——how shall I forget?——
When David's house was bare and men would come
From costly courts anbassadors and set
Their gifts before the wild Prince Absalom,
And how the king smiled ever and was dumb
Or, musing over caskets rich with nard,
Lifted his great head suddenly to the drum
Where Joab changed the guard.

There lay no leopards in the garden, then,
Nor many women; and the king in hall
Moved as a warrior moves among his men
When there is equity between them all;

Yet I have seen him quell a drunken brawl,
Striding like doom among the thrusting blades,
As might a sunbeam thrown beyond a wall
Dispel the gathered shades.

And in those days there was a man to lie
Upon a hard bed strewn along the floor,
But sweeter for deep slumber than the high
And perfumed couch that youth shall press no more
And sweeter, ah, God! sweeter for love's lore
And all the secret works and words of love
Than ever man and woman shared before
Or ever dreamed thereof.

Oh, God, my youth gone from me! Oh, the days
When life was pleasant on my lips and tongue!
The lordly banquets ringing round with praise!
The harps were sounded and the songs were sung!
The beauty of women, oh, like banners flung
Silken and splendid over marching men!
The lays, the lips, the loves when I was young
Who shall not love again!

Oh, flesh that I have fondled! Fingertips
That burned me over like small tongues of fire!
Oh, cruel kisses bitten through love's lips!
Oh, tears wrung deep from labor of desire!
Oh, bitter, brief, bright ecstasies that tire
Or ever their words are said between love's breath!
Oh, roses fallen from a smoldering pyre!
Oh, gold rings damned with death!

And think not that for Nathan's anger I
Could ever scourge my spirit to regret.
Though I had borne a score of babes to die
In mockery of tears and bearing sweat,
Yet had I been not less the queen and yet
Not less the mother of a race of kings
Then mated basely with a clown to get
And breed up underlings.

For Solomon shall reign! My son shall reign!
The king hath heard my prayer and he hath sworn.
And men are fled apart and Joab slain
And Adonijah taken on the Horn.
Ye women! Witness ye that I have borne
A king, that I have borne a king to be
A glory unto Israel and adorn
Her God's house royally.

And I shall walk in scarlet and my feet
Shall be shod on with leather and my hair
Bound up with snakes of ivory made to meet
And mate with amber serpents twisted there.
Bleeding with rubies, I will work and wear
Soft silks burned over with such priceless gems
As only women of a king may tea
From conquered diadems.

The purple hearts of sapphires and the eyes
Of topaz I will have and all my girls
Shall gleam for bearing thick on breasts and thighs
These embers that are opals and for pearls

Wept out of Heaven, long ago, where curls
The lone South Sea to isles of amethyst,
And emeralds more lovely than the whorls
Of young leaves rimmed with mist.

Dwellers in tents, the desert tribes shall come
With fleeces whiter than a maiden's feet;
The Mede shall march with cymbal and with drum,
The Scythian hordes with barley and fine wheat;
And Tyre shall trade and Sidon send and treat;
And heathen nations from beyond the seas
Shall give thick gold and all rare things and sweet
And all things good for ease.

The cities of the world shall comfort thee,
O Israel! And all its laboring ships
Shall bear their burdens to thy treasury
And thou shalt be as one who sits and sips
Honey and wine made cool with snow that drips
From dark deep hollows in the tumbled hills
And thou shalt have sweet savors at thy lips
And no more taste of ills.

Thou shalt go mailed in silver and thy shield
Shall be of beaten burnished plates of gold;
The color of thy kings' tents pitched in field
Shall be of Tyrian purple. Who shall hold
Triumphantly against thee, as of old?
And who shall bear the shaking of thy spear?
Thy days have not been numbered nor been told
The deeds that thou shalt hear.

For lo, now, God hath raised a young man up
To judge thee and to weld thy tribes in one;
And thou shalt eat with justice and thy cup
Shall brim with mercy under Solomon;
And all that live and move beneath the sun
Shall know thee what thou art; and every clime
Shall praise thee; and the lords of Babylon
Shall fear thee out of time.

There never shall be any more at all
Forgetfulness of thee, forever; thou
Shalt be a deathless beauty mystical
In woven veils of temples; on thy brow
The morning star shall flame, as even now,
Till Eden be re-opened and the bar
Against thy sins and sufferings allow
Peace and the evening star.

EXILE

I'll not return to Arcady
  Though you are going there,
Nay, though you beckon me to come
  With vine leaves in your hair.
The way is strange, the road is long,
  The wild west wind is cold
And I should miss a face I knew
  In Arcady of old.

I'll not return to Arcady.
  Today I saw a boy
Blow kisses to a little maid
  Who laughed in wanton joy,
And as he swaggered down the street,
  A song upon his tongue,
The whole wide world was Arcady
  To him, for he was young.

A CHRISTMAS IDYLL

There were three mages of the East
Went bearing gifts to make a feast
And came to Bethlehem.
The first mage brought of frankincense
Full goodly store for reverence
In woven anadem;
The second, in his mantle's fold,
Bare beaten silver and red gold;
Whiles for an harbinger
There flamed a strange white Star in Heaven,
Waxen more bright than planets seven;
The third mage carrieth myrrh.

All weary in a tavern shed
Lay Mary that was brought to bed
Of Godis only Son.
And Mary had for handmaidens
Three women that were never men's
To wive as all men wonn.
Two damsels were right fair and sweet,
The third wore over hands and feet
Amber from sea-side ta'en.
And Mary's cloke was soft with fur

And a gold girdle belted her
Of writhen serpents twain.

Three mages stand upon the straw.
They lifted up their eyne and saw
The Blessed Babe; and laid
Down treasures of bright Eastern kings——
Spikenard and gems and finger-rings
And pearls and purple and jade——
Whereat a golden beam of light
Fell in slant wise athwart the night
And Angels thronged thereon
Came caroling from the Halls of Heaven,
"Lo, unto us a Child is given
And unto us a Son!"

AND ONE WITH SECRET TEARS

When high at noon Apollo rides
  Before the eyes of men,
Unseen above her seething tides,
  Who speaks of Luna then?

A man shall die, and, lost to creeds,
  Forget his dreams and fears,
And one shall mourn in widow's weeds
  And one with secret tears.

DEGRADATION

Now, surely, I am twice a fool
  To break my heart by night and day
Because a woman's mocking lips
  Are turned away.

I made her throbbing songs; I said:
  "This one last time before I die
I will pour life like water out
  Nor question why."

I said: "I will burn out of me
  All lingering loves of other years
And all old bitter wisdom learned
  With bitter tears."

And now the foolishness of this:
  Though she has only scorn of me,
I think I am grown half in love
  With beggary!

I SAID I WOULD NOT BIND ME

I said I would not bind me to be a slave of toil,
To barter youth and gladness for any golden spoil;
I said the stars were naked and the wild winds were free
And I would have a free heart to round the world with me.

I said I would not bind me, but one came tripping by,
And there was laughter on her lip and promise in her eye,
And when she left the wide road I followed down a lane
To dwell among the toilers and toil among the grain.

I said I would not bind me, but I have pawned my heart
To buy a bit of farm-land, a cottage, and a cart.
And how can I forgive them, the Liar and the Lie,
That lured me from my wandering and brought me here to die?

OLD SHIPS

The merchandise of all the earth
  Was theirs to bear: the merchandise
Of autumn-scented wine for mirth
  In man's eyes and in woman's eyes,
And gold and silver and soft silk
  And curious amber flecked with mist
And all wrought ivory, white like milk,
  And oil and wool and amethyst.

The ships of Carthage and the ships
  Of Tyre about the windy seas
From isles of Ind where honey drips
  To the far Cimbric Chersonese
And Rome's triremes of saffron sails,
  With girls to grace an emperor's feast,
And Spanish galleons big with bales
  And junks of all the lecherous East. . .

Their bones are bleached on shimmering coasts;
  At broken wharves they reek and rot;
They walk the seas like grimly ghosts
  Of dead men out of days forgot.
Old ships, old ships! The merchandise
  Of all the earth was theirs to bear
When they were flown with enterprise
  And their dark hulls were fair.

BEFORE DAWN

GUINEVERE:

This is the last time we shall ever meet,
This is the last time, lying against thy feet,
  With hair let down like gold strewn over them,
My fingers and my lips will touch thee, Sweet.

Ah, hold me close and closer! Comfort me
With kisses pressed across the long lone sea
  That even now sweeps, tide on surging tide,
Between me and my longing after thee.

How swift the moon runs down the sky tonight
Like a white doe hunted by dogs of light!
  And all the color and wonder of the world
Will pass with these last hours of her flight.

And when the sonnets of the nightingales
Have ended in the thickets in the swales,
  The dawn will course above an empty earth
And all our loves will be as old wives' tales.

For never, though I live a thousand years,
Shall prayer avail nor magic of deep tears
  To break my heart for kisses down my breast
Or for thy fancied footsteps in my ears.

And never, should we meet again in hall
By chance of travel or as war may fall,
  Can we spring soul to soul, as in the time
Moment by moment going beyond recall.

Dost thou remember how, upon a day
When all the land burned blithely into May,
  A clump of spears came glancing to my gate
And thou made'st one—and there was naught to say?

For, seeing thee afar off, in my heart
I had said truly where I leaned, apart,
  "God help me now if thou are not the king!
And oh, God help me if indeed thou art!"

Oh, gold upon a warrior's helm by day!
Oh, steel borne swiftly down the king's highway!
  Oh, banners blown along the woods like flame!
Oh, youth gone riding in the month of May!

The hazel and the hawthorne and the pine,
The violet's purple and the purple vine—
  Dost thou remember, O my friend? And oh,
The windy hillsides fired with eglantine?

And thus by mountain mere and woodland grot
And many a Druid shrine to Gods forgot,
  Till, flung along the sunset, royally,
Golden with glory, the towers of Camelot.

Ah, then, the days at banquet where the king
Pledged all his knights, the roofs re-echoing,
  And thy grave eyes poured kisses in my cup
For our own revels, wing to secret wing!

Ah, then, the elfin music of the horns
Wound in the woods away on hunting morns

When hearts went pagan, hearing on the wind
Daughters of Odin singing of the Norns!

And ah, the violent splendor of the lists
And Dagonet dancing, hawks on motley wrists,
While thou and Tristram, Gawain and Geraint
Fought for my snood of pearls and amethysts!

I would our lives were over! Oh, would God
We two were lying under the cold sod
With rain and sun and snow thrown over us
Forever as the seasons may be shod!

Would God the winds had blown us out of time
And all regret of roses and of rime
And winnowed us among the mocking stars
Farther than ever dreams have dared to climb!

Would God, would God the seas of all the years
Broke over us with salter waves than tears!
That all the earth of mountains weighed us down
Deeper in silence than the rolling spheres!

But this is madness! Must I harrow thee
With idle lamentation, seeing that we
Have kissed our souls together? O my Love,
Lie still a little longer! Bear with me!

Once, long ago, when thou wast with the king
Far in some pagan realm adventuring,
I lay within my chamber, wanting sleep—
Indeed, I cannot well resolve this thing!

Methought there came an Ancient through the wall,
The stones and arras parting not at all,
  Bearing a wrinkled parchment and a staff,
An older man than any in Arthur's hall.

How long time passed I know not. Head to head
We stared. I could not know if he were dead.
  Till, speaking in a great low voice of doom,
"Mordred!" the windy echoes murmured "——dred!"

It was a night in winter. No man stirred,
No scent of flower nor any song of bird;
  And only the fierce wolf-hound on the hearth
Growled in his sleep as he had something heard.

Ah, Mordred, son of Morgawse! Wilt thou yet
Have tears and death and ruin for a debt
  Paid over with deep penance long ago
Or ever the king was crowned or me had met?

Must I, whose face lured Arthur from desire
Of his own sister's body, purge in fire
  And heartbreak all the secret shames and sins
Thy mother made at incest, and thy sire?

It might have been forever but for thee,
And Lancelot still the prince of chivalry,
  Wearing my favor through a courtly world
With none to leer, devising infamy.

It might have been that God had pitied us
Some day when days are ended, meaning thus

To leave our souls together, though in Hell
With lords and other ladies glorious.

Ah, there with lovely vestals that were hurled
From rock Tarpeian in the Roman world,
Amestris, Hero, and the great fair queen,
Semiramis, with king-kissed hair uncurled.

There Phryne and the knight Hyperides.
God knoweth they get no good days, now, nor ease,
But how oh, better than dividing streets
Thronged wide through golden Heaven is Hell to these!

I think that Holy Mary must forgive
All lovers who are parted and yet live,
That our dear Lord some penance will remit
To those amerced in love renunciative.

For now our dream is over and our days
Brought to the weary round of one who lays
Unceasing prayers before the feet of Christ,
Yet doubts the worth of that for which he prays.

For, having parted, never, though we meet
Hereafter, can we any more entreat
The old unbroken innocence of love
When no man else was brave nor woman sweet.

There should be always something like a wraith
Lurking along the shadowy halls of faith
Till passion fled and left us stammering there
With dreams gone strange and evil unto death.

Grown weary of long war and sick at heart,
Man may forget a woman when, apart,
  She throweth no more a glamor over him
And nearer beauty burneth with newer art;

Since he that loveth woman loveth much
The bending of her body and the touch
  And all the delicate perfume of her hair
And tenderness—he loveth even such.

And hast thou loved me better? Whether it is
My lips have gleaned a glory from thy kiss,
  Or whether thy great soul was matched with mine
When God made all things first—I know not this.

But think'st thou that, another's concubine,
I would break bread with Arthur or drain wine?
  But that thou'rt more than God's fair face to me,
I would play traitor to thy king and mine?

When thou goest from me, having said farewell,
Thou leavest me awhile in utter Hell!
  How shall I love again, O Lancelot,
Who shall have sometime lain on asphodel?

And if tonight there is no ghost, I ween,
Nor any God or Devil to contravene
  The kisses of thy mouth across my throat,
Nor any flesh of man to come between,

Must hungry lips that only thine allay
Cling to the empty breasts of yesterday

As poor thin babes', in famine-stricken lands,
To mothers fallen down dead beside the way?

Is there no comfort more in gathering years
Than hearts resigned and sodden ash of fears,
Where once the wild fires ravaged all the soul
In ever-lengthening intervals of tears?

Must I from April's coronals come to wear
Dark rue for secret windings in my hair,
And still forego thy splendor and thy fame?
My punishment is more than I can bear!

No more to sit among my maids and dream
Where roses brush the breast of some still stream
Like rubies hung upon a girl's white throat,
Forming thy blazonry in every gleam!

No more to pluck from harpstrings tears of song
Not made by bards for all the wan wild throng,
But sweetly bitter couplets to an air
Rung far from bells of silence all night long!

No more, ah, nevermore! to watch for thee
Riding from distant wars victoriously!
The color of all my life is drab with death!
My glory is departed! Comfort me!

LANCELOT:
Lady and Love, as sails of some far ship,
Blown to the west at sunset, rise and dip,

Crimson and golden over golden seas,
Thy wild words burn and vanish at thy lip.

Since thou wilt have it so, this is the end.
That we shall meet no more, oh, God forfend!
But love and all fair ways and words of love—
With these we shall have naught to make or mend.

Nay, O thou beauty of the world! what more
Have we to tell each other? What old score
Of kisses forfeit unto angers past?
Or what last vows wrung from us at the door?

Or ever his father gets him, man is dead.
He speaks not neither hears what things are said.
Singing with swords go battles up and down,
But nothing recks he, then, of armies' tread.

And when the lancehead of some younger knight,
Thrust over shield, hath ended sound and sight,
Let war blaze ever through the king-starred earth,
He shall not rise nor smitten be nor smite.

The summer will come back with all the hills
Rolling in green to meads of daffodils,
And idle flocks gone grazing in the sun,
And bird songs bickering over sylvan rills.

The grape will burn to glory and the oak
Revel in opals flaming down his cloak

While, gold within the autumn, gold with grain,
The fields will rest in thin blue veils of smoke.

Again high halls will roar with song, again
There will be lights and feasting among men,
Though winter ride the wind on wings of ice
And wolves howl nearer from their foodless fen.

But, silent in the sepulchre, no more
Shall man rise up from sleeping on the floor
Nor look upon the earth's face flushed with spring
Nor lift the long bars lightly from his door.

Yet not with us hereafter as hath been
With those whom beauty hath not entered in,
Somehow my dust will drift where thine is laid,
Somewhere my soul rejoin thee and re-win!

We have been beautiful. Till time is done
And all men cease from singing 'neath the sun,
There shall be songs in hovel and in hall,
Rhyming our meetings over, one by one.

Not glory nor the mighty fames of kings
Beat through the storms of time on tireless wings
As love's tales flown down centuries and far
Out of dim days and proud, mysterious things.

Death and the stars keep silence! But the wind
Whispers forever of some isle or Ind
Where once the years flung fever in their cup
Whose names are magic, having sighed and sinned.

Wherefore I think that, childless as thou art,
Thou shalt have yet some comfort when we part,
  Seeing that men will link us, name to name,
Down all the deathless histories of the heart.

It shall not be with us as it must be
With lovers lost beyond some unknown sea,
  And no man saith the glory of their days.
We shall not pass to silence. Comfort thee!

RENUNCIATION

Roses are a dead delight
  When upon the wind they wave,
Since I found them, red and white,
  Where they grew upon thy grave.

Kisses are a dead desire,
  Strange as water after wine,
Since I drained the icy fire
  From those pale dead lips of thine.

TO LEAVE IN MAY

Goodby, and if you will, forget,
  There are so many men
Another's arm will comfort you
  When spring comes round again.

And you will walk beneath the trees,
  Wondering then, as now,
Why he that once has kissed your lips
  Will only kiss your brow.

The worst of women is the thing
  Which fools have found the best—
You will be true and helpless, you
  Will lie along his breast.

For you can never understand
  And he can never say,
In April it is time to love,
  But time to leave in May.

I WOULD REMEMBER CONSTANT THINGS

The little broken bones of men,
  They ride on every wind that blows,
With dust of Memphis whirled again
  And this year's dust of last year's rose;
The little bitter tears of men,
  They are but drops in the salt sea,
Lost forever beyond all ken
  Of flesh like you and me.

And though from mountains worn away
  I mix the mortar for my house
And build within the light of day
  For studious ease and long carouse,
The rain shall beat above my head,
  The wind shall rattle my bolted door,
And all the ghosts of all the dead
  Shall pace my fire-lit floor.

Yet I will fashion greater Gods
  For Lares, now, than other men;
I would forget how Sirius plods
  Through galaxies and back again;
I would remember constant things,
  As sleep whereof no dreams affray,
Before the wind on wandering wings
  Has blown my bones away.

AFTERWARDS

When you have leashed the hawk desire
  By jess and varvel,
    You will sit,
Silent, beside your daughter's fire
  And she will marvel,
    While you knit,
That one there was who loved to rhyme
  Your face with all he dreamed or said—
When you are old and tired of time
  And I am dead.

Ah, Love, the days are overfleet
  Before December,
    Though we spend
Not all the summer's gold, and, Sweet,
  Though we remember
    Till the end.
There shall be time to chide desire
  When all our passionate prayers are said
And you are old beside the fire
  And I am dead.

CHANSONETTE D'AMOUR

O blossoms white on apple boughs,
  And flame of love!
O burdens of bent apple boughs,
  And fruits of love!
Love cometh like a border thief,
Nor beareth part in any grief,
And bright with all desire and brief
  The life of love.

O grapes that grow on purpled hills,
  And wine of love!
O withered vines on winter's hills,
  And lees of love!
Love hath his day of troubled breath
And, passing, utterly perisheth,
And bitterer than all other death
  The death of love.

MOOD

I awake and hear the rain
  On the sounding cells of night,
Like a threnody of pain
  For dead delight.

Shall I wake and turn again
  To that song above my head?
Shall I ever hear the rain
  When I am dead?

A LAMENT

Over the lake my lad has gone,
  Over the lake at the dawn of day,
And the waves they follow and fall and fawn
  And the children chatter, as children may,
And I sit and think, as the sun goes down
  In the mists of Michigan's western sea,
For what of the dreams he takes to town?
  And what of the dreams he leaves with me?

Over the lake my lad has gone
  As the sun must go at the close of day,
And the waves they tumble and roll and fawn
  And the elders gossip as elders may,
And I sit thinking, as light by light
  The windows look to the western sea—
Dear God, be good to my lad tonight!
  And oh, be merciful unto me!

WHALER'S CHANTEY

We've said goodby to our dearies,
  We've laid tobaccy in store,
We're startin' a three-year whalin' cruise
  From Hell to Singapore;
The wind is over the quarter,
  The banks are under our lee—
Heave—O! Tail onto a sheet!
  We're standin' out to sea!

Her fo'c's'le's painted with whitewash,
  Her hold is pumped out dry,
There's empty barrels atween decks,
  An' the boats are nested high;
There's mebbe a thousan' fish to catch
  An' a lump of ambergree—
An' the ol' tub carries a bone in her teeth
  A-snorin' down to sea!

There's gals a-plenty in Boston
  Will moor you if they can,
But seldom a gal can ride it out
  With a rovin' sailor-man.
Oh, the wind is over the quarter,
  The banks are under our lee—
Heave—O! Tail onto a sheet!
  We're standin' out to sea!

WILD

When I was young and handsome
  A lady loved me well,
And whether it was wise to go
  Who is there to tell?
But soon I rose and left her
  And looked in other eyes,
For liberty is more than faith
  And beauty more than lies.

When I was young and handsome
  (And that was long ago),
I might have been a richer man,
  One lady loved me so;
But I have marched with legions
  And sailed the seas in ships,
For life is more than husbandry
  And love than woman's lips.

WAY OF A MAID WITH A MAN

Daughter of Eve, daughter of Eve,
Why do you linger and languish and grieve?
Beauty is yours, even beauty to weave
Chains for the Son of the Morning.

Nay, there is someone who follows me not
Gone far away from this wearisome spot,
Someone who saw me and turned and forgot,
Wherefore I weep in the morning.

Daughter of Eve, daughter of Eve,
Lo, he returns to you, he that would leave,
See how he comes with his heart on his sleeve,
Cleaving the mists of the morning.

Nay, I had dreamed 't was his pleasure ana plot
To force me to follow him—why did he not?—
With Eden behind us and Eden forgot,
Into the gold of the morning.

BEAUTY

O Beauty, thou Goddess Immortal,
  There is none other like to thee, none!
We grave many names on thy portal,
  But the gold is not fallen from one.
Thou art served and the flame of thine altars
  Fed full by the king and the clod
And a priest of thy word never palters,
  Unknowable God!

Thou goest in robes of the morning
  A Light and a Mystery, thou.
The galaxy gleams for adorning
  The locks of thine infinite brow.
Man lives not who does not adore thee,
  Whether Jupiter, Jesus or Thor
Be the image he bows to before thee,
  Serene Avatar!

Thou hast cloven the mountains in sunder
  And crowned them with chrysolite crowns;
Thou ringest the bells of the thunder;
  The seas are flung white at thy frowns;
Thou hast not to do with our seeming
  From the womb to the wave or the sod,
But alone of thy grace is our dreaming,
  Invisible God!

For love of thee men are begotten
  Who brand their begetting as sin,

But these thou hast lost and forgotten,
To thy porches they shall not go in;
They shall wander in chaos forever,
They shall bitterly pray for thy ruth,
O just and inflexible Giver
Of glimpses of truth!

Thy votaries, pale as from poring
Over mysteries wrought in thy name,
Come forth of thy temples, adoring,
With fingers and lips dropping flame.
Beaten down by the light of thy station,
Overawed by thine axes and rods,
We rise but to pour thee libation,
O Goddess of Gods!

From sistrum and lyre thou has shaken
The sounds that were gendered in thee,
All the laughter of nymphs overtaken,
All the thunder that sings in the sea.
We have caught from the fire of thy singing
Such embers of passion as flame
Through the last constellations where, winging,
Young Gods bear thy name.

Out of darkness thou givest to shame us
Dim fabrics and delicate things
That were woven in centuries famous
For glory of delicate kings,
Carved vessels of gold and all manner
Of silver wrung virgin from fire,

And velariums, banner on banner
In purple of Tyre.

Almost of thy might thou persuadest
The triumph from tombs and the sting
From death, seeing thou never fadest,
But risest, O Phoenix! in spring.
Almost thou wilt have us remember
The old legends of earth and the dream
That after the flame and the ember
The soul is supreme.

And we that have lain upon roses
And drunk of the lethe of love,
What more can we ask, as life closes,
Of Fates underneath or above?
What more than soft arms and bright bosoms
Whereon to grow sated and sleep
With a wreath on the brows of such blossoms
As Naiads may reap?

For most thou hast made of thine image
In waters that ceaselessly roll
From ages forgot to that dim age
When man shall at last be a soul.
Oh, most thou hast left us reflected,
Of all we can picture of thee,
In a brothel, a hell unsuspected——
The depths of the sea.

Yea, scented with summer and spices
That never have trembled with cold,

Thou, Beauty, hast wrought thy devices
  On islands and inlands of gold
Where, deep over decks that were gory
  For woman or gem or doubloon,
The waves to the winds tell a story,
  The winds to the moon.

What ghosts of great ships from far places,
  Weighed down with rich burdens of bales!
What dreams and ambitions! What faces
  Of virgins denuded of veils!
What captives more lovely than flowers
  Lie still under seaweed and sea!
What lips that have kissed in what bowers!
  What fruits of the tree!

Are they gone, are they vanished forever?
  Are their passions all quenched in the brine?
Must they sleep in a palace and never
  Learn aught of those walls berylline?
Dim grottoes and strewn-over niches
  With amber and opal and pearl——
Is there none to rejoice in those riches,
  No gallant or girl?

Who knows but in caverns of coral,
  Lit round by a lamp not of fire,
They speak in a language not oral
  And love without flesh for desire?
We walk in a world where but cant is
  And measure the motions of Mars——

Who knows but the folk of Atlantis
  Forgive us our stars?

For out of our hearing and vision
  Lie more than our senses can tell——
Fair worlds too minute for division
  And nebulae deeper than Hell.
Thou hast not to do with our seeming
  From the womb to the wave or the sod,
But alone of thy grace is our dreaming,
  Invisible God!

Oh, then, let the eyes of thy lovers
  Grow misty with dreams of thy face
Till the day when thy mercy discovers
  Thy veiled and intolerable grace!
Till the day when the last of the nations,
  From altars of idols bowed down,
Shall arise and with chanted libations
  Hail thee and thy crown!

FOR LOVE IS OF THE VALLEY

I wonder who the woman was
  That loved him there in Galilee
Or ever he put off the garb
  Of carpentry.

And went she up to Golgotha?
  She had but little ease, I ween,
For leave to kiss his hands and feet
  With Magdalene.

Oh, better feed the flame of love
  In any sober shepherd lad
Than wither at the blazing lips
  Of one called mad.

CHANSON DE MYSTERE

They say heard melodies are sweet,
  But those unheard are sweeter far;
And two may dream and never meet
  Beneath one star.

And two may live their whole lives through,
  Wanton with joy for roses blown,
Who might have gleaned but weeds and rue
  Had they but known.

So little comes upon the sight
  When pent by day in golden bars,
But oh, the vistas of the night
  Beyond the stars!

Sonnets

SONNETS OF A MINNESINGER

I

I will have done with following Beauty's face,
Who has no heart of tenderness for me,
But walks alone, mysterious as the sea,
Luring me always from my proper place;
I will have done with all her endless grace,
Since I may not thus follow endlessly,
For I have only seen what all men see
Who cheat death proudly for a little space.
It is as if one, daring before dawn
The keep of some old castle, thinks to find
Something of triumph, having left behind
Dark muttering halls where nameless ghosts have trod,
But suddenly through the roof looks out upon
The impregnable bright battlements of God.

II

When my heart breaks at last with beauty of sound
Gone always, like some elfin violin,
Beyond full hearing, weird and sweet and thin
And never to be caught up and never found,
Oh, bury me then so deep down in the ground
That I shall hear no music more of sin
Or burning of red clouds when dawns begin
Or ever again hear faint, far bugles wound.
And bury me where the wind has all forgot
To whisper of still moons at midnight, where

No breeze may wanton through a woman's hair,
And surely where no ribald gales conspire
To boast how sails crept home to Camelot
And purple sails bore boldly forth from Tyre.

III

If sonnets and if songs were made for this—
To burn upon love's altars and to stay,
Even for the passing of an autumn day,
Oblivion from the memory of a kiss,
They had been dumb beneath the Acropolis
And we had never heard one roundelay
Of Ermengarde's or Borgia's beauty——nay,
Nor what wild passion flamed in Tomyris.
But one who sits in silence and apart,
Maddened with bitter melodies and sweet,
Shall rise and wander singing through the street,
Heedless of hindrance in the mocking throngs,
And pluck the broken lutestrings of his heart
For sonnets and for little sounding songs.

IV

A strange thing happened only yesterday;
For when I saw you walking in the sun
I half forgot you were a skeleton,
So gracefully I marked you swing and sway,
And, somehow gloriously, were veiled away
The barren bones and you appeared as one
Carved out of flame or as a spirit spun
On God's own loom to make an angel gay.
Ah, well, it was a trick of thought, a jest

Played by the beast within me which knows not
That all its days, since ever 'twas begot,
Bulk not so large as one drop in the sea,
But, looking on the movement of your breast,
Sings as the Sons of God might——passionately.

V

Not with wild words nor yet with wilder tears
Can we two kiss and part, for we have taken
Fame for our God and finally have forsaken
Love and all faiths of love and all love's fears.
Oh, we of the singing lips, we have stopped our ears
And left forever the hearth-side; we are shaken
Far too deep down with dawn winds to awaken
And go about the business of love's years.
Yet for a bright, brief while let us pretend
That our two hearts hold passion overmuch,
Sweet to the taste and sweeter to the touch
And flown with madness and all mirth whereof
The great Gods yield a little, before the end,
For the sound and glory and ruffling drums of love.

VI

When you sit naked at your looking-glass,
Having combed hair, with kisses in your eyes,
Where the gold light falls intimately and lies
Tingeing your limbs to color of bright brass,
And when you see how silken movements pass
Through slender breasts and delicate flesh of thighs,
And being proud for beauty and most wise
In all love's ways and wizardries——alas!——

I wonder do you sometimes muse the while
And feel a sudden tenderness for men
Denied the solace of your body then
When their lips left you passionless and cool,
Or do you watch but your own grace and smile
As once Narcissus down a sylvan pool?

VII

Some day, when time has left you calm and wise
To look at last within your glass and say
"Can it be true that sober men and gay
Loved this face, once, and kissed these weary eyes?
That there was ever aught in the replies
These old and writhen lips could once betray
To heal and hurt the passion of a day?
Or in cold hands the touch that pacifies?"—
Will you remember, being heartsick, then,
That, woven in some little song of mine,
Your name for warp made all the woof's design
Brilliant and beautiful and like to shed
Something of pride hereafter among men?
Will you remember and be comforted?

VIII

When you are come to three-score years and ten,
If, nodding in your chair, you dream on me
And wake to smile a little, wearily,
Thinking "For he was like as other men,"
I shall have been long dead, long buried, then
(Haply beside some ever-sounding sea),
But should you muse and sigh regretfully

"He came and kissed and never came again"—
Then think how, on the very lips of love,
The serpents' tongues we seek to kiss away
Grow ever sharp and deadlier, day by day,
Even as hearts grow older, aye, and old;
And think how better is the loss thereof
Than tenderness turned bitter and touch cold.

IX

Last year I loved a lady, oh, as fair
As ever queen that men have bled to kiss,
And now my whole heart's chalice, poured with bliss,
Brims in the fragrance of your hands and hair.
I cannot dream of loving otherwhere
Than your soft indolence of beauty is—
Yet all the dead past haunts me, whispering this:
"Next year thou shalt remember, but not care."
I think there is no bitterer wine to sup
Than when man's idols have been tumbled down
He needs must grave new images and crown
New Gods in ancient temples. Oh, as gall
And utter wormwood in a golden cup,
Not whom we love, but love, is all in all.

X

You that have mystery, you that have dark hair,
Smooth arms to kiss and small breasts and long hips,
You that delight, with sensitive fingertips,
To touch warm gold and soft warm flesh and fair,
O you of the bitter eyes and the tired air
Of Sappho singing low through sobbing lips

Bruised for being crushed all night by one who sips
Delectably rich wines of pleasure there——
Although you are a singer and care less
For any man or me or any thing
Than only that God give you days to sing
The banners in your blood out, passionately,
Sometimes desire shall lend you tenderness,
Deep in the night when you remember me.

XI

Yet if wise men smile down at you and say
"Ah, well, but you are young and some few years
Will etch your face with acid of such tears
As only age can wholly dry away,"
Let not these ancients rob you of your day,
Who are themselves half mad with grisly fears
Of one that hath not eyes nor nose nor ears
Nor any soft warm fingers fit for play.
The old are bitter for lost youth; the old
Shiver in rags of worn philosophies;
They are dying from life; the very words of these
Smack of dead bones and blasted ecstasy.
But O thou Youth of the roses and the gold,
Ride hard, love long, drink deep, live dangerously!

XII

You beauty, oh, you beauty! Paint your eyes
And paint your cheeks and lips and bring desire
Leaping along my veins to be the sire
Of little death's-heads like us in some wise.
Fool me with kisses and with enterprise

Delude me till I tremble like a wire
Plucked by a poet's fingers at a lyre
Deep among roses when the winter dies.
Your flesh is thinner than a comet's tail;
Your bones alone are matter; and I would
There were more color in your fevered blood
To hide the empty arches of your hips.
Ah, Love, why must you be so always pale?
Paint and yet paint your eyes and cheeks and lips!

XIII

Not to great music nor from lips ablaze
With passion of singing songs flown out like fire,
These verses, fashioned to a broken lyre
In somber cities and forgotten ways,
Have little of April's madness or of May's
And little of June's intolerable desire,
They do not ache with August nor suspire
In purple and amber wrung from autumn days.
I am no singer such as others are
Whose throats are gold bells pealing over the land;
They are the bards of nations and they stand
In kings' halls, clothed in velvet and in vair;
While I but murmur, at a casement bar,
Idylls and threnes, because your face is fair.

XIV

If we had met and parted in such wise
As tall ships meet and part upon the sea—
Speak word of ports and pass irrevocably,
Each to its haven under different skies—

If, with calm hands and eyes on radiant eyes,
With laughing lips and hearts from anguish free,
We two had kissed and parted joyously,
Turning with never tears away, nor sighs—
Ah, Love, I had remembered all my days,
And it had been, with all life overpassed,
Had heard you singing somewhere at the last,
Serene beyond the Pleiads, where the shore
Beats to a paean wrung from lonely ways:
"Whom the Gods join are sealed forevermore!"

XV

Since all love's ways and all love's wounds are sweet
And there's not any bitterness in love,
Let us forget the utter end thereof,
Trodden down swiftly by remorseless feet,
And let us stand with arms flung wide to greet
The broken body of the dying dove
With not more wisdom than we gaze above
And dream God reigns forever. Ah, repeat
No more the bitter songs that I have made
Nor more the sounding sonnets. If to us
This ringing day has entered glorious,
Why should we dread the sunset? Shall the bars
Of night be closer or more firmly stayed?
Dawn is a veil drawn down to hide the stars.

XVI

I have come home, at last, I have come home,
Weary of wandering idly among men,
And I will nevermore go forth again,

Since all roads lead by devious ways to Rome.
Not the gray turret nor the dreaming dome
Nor the long hall that rang with music, then,
Has thrilled my heart to ecstasy as when
I have come home, my Love, I have come home.
Your hands are like pale roses in the dusk
And roses like the passion of your hands;
I have not learned, in any of earth's lands,
A pillow of such comfort as your breast;
Nor ever, under winds blown deep with musk,
Said to my soul: "Be still and take thy rest!"

BORGIA

No more the furious revels and no more
The dangerous trysts and secret nights of love
Nor any more forever the songs whereof
The halls of Rome were amorous of yore.
Now is that palace unto ruin given o'er,
The walls grown loathsome with soft things that move,
And owls have refuge in the roofs above
And asps and adders and scorpions on the floor.
I dreamed of thee again, last night, and stood
Against the curtains of thy tumbled bed,
Seeing the fallen hair about thine head
And all the broken beauty that was thine,
And seeing upon thy mouth a trace of blood
And under thee crushed roses and spilt wine.

NAPOLEON

Thy name is bright with sabers and thy name
Is big with guns; magnificent and stern
The somber eagles brood above thine urn
Between the moldering standards' dusty flame;
And still across the empires men acclaim
The splendor of thy destiny and turn
Still to thy terrible battle fires that burn
In distant, billowing holocausts of fame.
O thou proud Lucifer, thou Morning Star,
Thou brilliant, cold, white glory in the West,
The heart's drums thunder, breaking in the breast,
For muttering o'er thy triumphs, one by one,
As if again were bugles blown for war
Through streets gone brave with banners in the sun!

TO A POET DYING YOUNG

You came and there was music, for your hands
Swept suddenly from dusty, slumbering strings
A rapture as of half-remembered things,
A glory of dim days and ancient lands,
And something valiant as of broken brands,
And clean and swift as of a lark that sings
Joyously under heaven on your wings,
And something sad, too, as of drifted sands.
You came and there was music. And for us
There never shall be throbbing viols again
Without the sense of something gone from men,
Something of beauty vanished from the hill
Whereon you walked a brief while glorious.
The rest is silence. But the stars are still!

VIKINGS

So all day long they rowed, and with a song
Wilder than wings of gulls, Leif Ericson
Stood to the tiller, calling, one by one
Great praise on Gods and heroes; all night long
Bellowed the waves with thunder; bold and strong
The thews of Thor bore to the sunken sun,
Heavy in hammered gold, until they won
Through Ymir's blood and winds that brawl and throng.
Ha! Not from these the darkness of the deep
Struck terror, nor the tempest; not from these
The Spaniard's prayer for sweet familiar seas,
Blown warm with summer scents, wherein to lave,
But only, after labor, the sad sleep
And the bright name and glory of the brave.

IN MEMORIAM

I would arise now, since none other sings
The beauty and the glory that are gone,
I would arise and utter a song, drawn
Forth of long brooding over muted strings.
For late I dreamed one came on splendid wings,
Between the dusks of sunset and of dawn,
Wherefrom a feather brushed my lips upon,
Sealing them unto silence for base things,
And clear and sweet as one great chord vibrates
Beyond its full concordances of sound,
There rang a voice in all the air around,
Bell-toned, like surf upon reverberant shores,
Crying: "Lift up, lift up your heads, O Gates,
Be ye lift up, ye everlasting Doors!"

OLD MAID

God knows how many nights upon her bed
She dreamed another Latmus, while the hot
Sweet winds of summer in her garden-plot
Kissed away tears from roses comforted.
God knows what flaming verses she has read
To keep vicarious trysts with Lancelot,
Broken with brooding over loves forgot
And lawless revels of the pagan dead.
But she has conquered all her blood's desire,
Cheated her soul of sin as misers cheat,
And now she pauses on proud, hesitant feet
At lighted rooms where men and women mix,
With amorous eyes fearful of unknown fire—
A naked nun clasping the crucifix!

THE JEST

Phaon, when Aphrodite made you over,
Gave you bright youth and beauty and dark hair
And touched your flesh and left it firm and fair
To eat thick honey and lie all day in clover,
She fetched from Heaven a wondrous cloak to cover
Your shoulders broad with boat labor, and there
Robed you in princely raiment, made you heir
To lips of her who had been Athis' lover.
All these good gifts the Goddess gave you, Phaon,
But, as I think, she must have left you blind,
Seeing that you walk in Lesbian ways nor find
Those little fragrant foot-prints on the shore.
Gods! What a sorry jest was this to play on
One who had else been dead forevermore

TO OMAR KHAYYAM

Persian! I fill with red, forbidden wine
This cup grown dusty from long abstinence,
And pledge that leisure when, for recompense,
On some green garden's bank I shall recline,
Listing your praise of beauty and the vine
And scorn of little men's intelligence
And pity of it and of that insolence
Which must have right and wrong in things divine
For there are many blown so big with pride
They think they wear God's likeness! And they think
God cares a single cent though all men drink
To drown a little sorrow from their days!
Who are but vermin dreaming they shall ride
On deathless wings through infinite times and ways!

BOSWORTH FIELD

The sound of swords, the shock of broken shields
Rang in a fury of war that has been here
Where now the notes of noon, serene and clear,
Call home the tillers of these little fields.
Here raged Plantagenet, like a king that wields
Doom of an ax foredoomed before the spear
Of some king chosen by the Gods to fear
Death nor defeat nor any flesh that yields.
Almost again I see the dust clouds there,
Thronged on a wind above their heavy horse,
Smell the bright carnage reddening round his corse
Who fell forever with the fallen Rose
And hear again that turbulent music where,
Thundered of drums, the Tudor's triumph goes.

Forms of France

BALLADE OF MUTABILITY

Behold, thou art fair, my love, behold, thou art fair,
Like as one loved of old by Solomon;
Thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks; thy hair
Is pleasant as a stream from Lebanon;
Sweeter than calamus and cinnamon
Thy mouth; thy breast is whiter than white flame;
But——yet a day!——thy beauty shall be done
And time shall be when thou art but a name.

And wilt thou seek out Lesbos, then, and there
Rear up a tower of music toward the sun,
Where all day long run purple seas and where
The nights are nard for memories halcyon?
Where, Sappho, thy pure songs, from passion spun,
Must break men's hearts, but Lesbian waves proclaim
Thy tower shall fall, yea, even as Babylon,
And time shall be when thou art but a name.

All hail, victorious Soldier, hail! The blare
Of brazen bugles vaunting battles won,
The pageantry, the revelry, the prayer
In all the pomps of glory's orison,
And echoes wild of war, as gun on gun
Thunders thy welcome and thy sounding fame—
"Remember thou art mortal," whispers one,
"And time shall be when thou art but a name!"

L'ENVOI

Prince, there is none more loved of honor, none;
Thy deeds are blazoned which renown shall claim·
But Caesar dares no more the Rubicon,
And time shall be when thou art but a name.

BALLADE OF TWO LADIES

Ah, Circe, in your golden isle
Above the golden Grecian sea,
I learned the marvel of your smile,
Your beauty broke the heart of me.
Sweet were your eyes with mystery
And your white body sweet to kiss.
Alas, that we must parted be! . . .
(I wonder where Calypso is.)

Enchantress! Though the world revile
Your acts, your arts, your perfidy,
Could I condemn or blame you while
Your beauty broke the heart of me?
Fair hair and blown that wantonly
The sea-wind's fingers twined in his
Far from the good Penelope . . .
(I wonder where Calypso is.)

Your love has mile on weary mile
Beguiled my toil with witchery,
Your songs my day-dreams yet beguile,
Your beauty broke the heart of me.
No more forever, now, shall we,
We two, regain those hours of bliss
In life nor all eternity! . . .
(I wonder where Calypso is.)

L'ENVOI

When age her weird of years shall dree,
Remember, oh, remember this:
Your beauty broke the heart of me. . .
(I wonder where Calypso is

BALLADE IN TIME OF THE GREAT WAR

Reign of ruin! Who rides by night
Over the roads and past the weirs?
Looms a troop in the lurid light,
Rings a cry on the startled ears,
Hoof-beats volley among the meers,
The winds rush down and the dead leaves dance—
Rapiers, rapiers! Musketeers
Ride again in the land of France!

Boots and saddles! And bold and bright
Youth goes galloping, Youth that jeers
Death and the Dust in pride of might—
War is ever the word it hears;
Peace is ever the pact it fears
When roll the drums of the foe's advance.
Athos, Porthos, the Musketeers
Ride again in the land of France!

Thrust and parry and press the fight!
What of the heroes famed of years?
Lo, they fly with the eagle's flight
When France has need of them—France in tears!
Lo, they laugh at the foreign spears
And sing with the song of guns! Perchance
D'Artagnan and the Musketeers
Ride again in the land of France!

L'ENVOI

Stirrup-cups for the cavaliers,
And the old oath over of old romance—
"One for all!"—and the Musketeers
Ride again in the land of France!

PARIS—1456

Grim winter stars and goblin moons
Peep through their ragged winding sheet
And many a shadow sweeps and swoons
As Paris dreams and gray wolves meet;
The watch goes by on crunching feet
To halt within yon tavern's light
In envy of its ease and heat—
Villon is drinking deep tonight.

Fair Isabeau beside him croons
A love ballade of haunting beat;
The Abbess broods on yesternoons
When sparrows quarreled among the wheat;
And now a catch roars out to greet
New-beaded stoups or put to flight
The wail of night winds hagged with sleet—
Villon is drinking deep tonight.

Poor beggar of small royal boons,
Cut-purse and drabber, dicer, cheat,
Fellow to sworders, sots, buffoons
Hunted anon for gallows-meat,
Yet singer of high songs and sweet,
Tender of one grown old and white,
And sooth-sayer for stew and street—
Villon is drinking deep tonight.

L'ENVOI

My lords and gentlemen, we eat,
Toss pots and part from sound and sight.
I wonder in what ingle-seat
Villon is drinking deep tonight!

BALLADE OF LADIES OF TIMES GONE BY

(Being yet another translation of Villon's "Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis")

Tell me now in what land can be
Flora the Roman? Where remain
Fair Hipparchia's charms and she,
Thais, in beauty so germane?
Echo, calling afar, in vain,
Over the rivers and marshes wan,
Lovelier, once, than girls profane?
But where are the snows of last year gone?

Where's Heloise, that learn'd lady,
For whom was gelded—priestly gain!—
Pierre Esbaillart, at Saint Denis?
For love he bore such burden of pain.
And where is the queen who did ordain
And give command that Buridan
Be sewed in a sack and flung to Seine?
But where are the snows of last year gone?

Queen Blanche, white as a white lily,
Who sang in a voice of siren strain·
Berthe Gros-pied, Beatrix, Allys,
And Haremburges who ruled in Maine;
And that good Jeanne, maid of Lorraine

Burned by the English at Rouen—
Where are they, Virginal Suzerain?
But where are the snows of last year gone?

L ENVOI

Prince, to ask of this week abstain,
Nor seek to learn of this year anon,
Since will remain the one refrain—
But where are the snows of last year gone?

BALLADE OF LOST ILLUSION

I cannot sing of good Gods, but of great;
Nor think your faiths are stronger than your fears
Nor say the heron seeks no other mate,
Forgetting and forgot by yesteryear's;
Nor shall I hold that honor more endears
The recreant debtor of his rightful debt;
Nor yet deny, for any lover's ears,
They never shall forgive whose lips have met.

They see and marvel and they name it—fate;
Heart calls to heart across the barriers;
With fumbling fingers they unbar the gate;
They swear vain vows which Heaven never hears.
What reck they now of pillows wet with tears?
Pulses are thunder and flesh flame! And yet
A little knavish whisper flouts and fleers:
They never shall forgive whose lips have met.

For all love's days and nights are profligate,
And all love's ways are wanton till death nears;
And the lone heir of dead desire is hate,
Beggared with kisses, bitter with arrears;
And the soul smarts of little, crafty jeers
And when appears the shadow of regret
And wisdom, wan with many griefs, appears,
They never shall forgive whose lips have met.

L'ENVOI

Princess and all ye heavy-handed peers,
Learn now this rhyme and nevermore forget—
For life's a wind and love a vane that veers—
They never shall forgive whose lips have met.

RONDEL

Death is only a long forgetting
  After the sundown, hidden away
  In a cool dark bed at the end of day,
While the Gods keep watch and the stars are setting.

Why should we fear to have done with fretting
  At lust and labor and hate and play?
Death is only a long forgetting
  After the sundown, hidden away.

None of us lives without regretting
  The toil we gave for a pauper's pay;
  And we shall be fain at last to say,
What of the weary years and sweating:
Death is only a long forgetting.

RONDEAU OF REST

Under the hills they dream how Hector bled,
The great old Gods; nor dream that beauty fled
  Out of the earth and hid upon a star
  When Athens ruled no longer. . . . Who shall mar
The changeless, fond illusions of the dead?

And there the gnomes keep fires aglow that shed
A glory on their gold and rubies red . . .
  Who knows what treasures they have hoarded far
    Under the hills?

And you and I, when all our prayers are said
And we have crept—oh, wearily!—to bed,
  Let us forget the laboring world and bar
  Our sleep against the sound of things that are
And sleep and dream of happier things instead,
    Under the hills.

SESTINA OF ONE FACE FAIR

I said once in my heart, "Now it is May
I will put by all bitterness and care
And live a brief while joyously and say
Mad words of beauty unadorned and bare
That God shall learn how, even for a day,
I, too, was young and found my love's face fair."

And seeing how the world was free and fair,
I went along its roads, as free men may,
Singing mad songs, and all my singing bare
Such praise of God as only youth can say;
And all my heart was happy without care,
So much my love's face moved me in that day.

There was a little pool half burned in day,
Half hidden in deep shadows, and it was fair
With all wild iris and green leaves of May,
Wherein young girls washed their bright bodies bare;
But while I thought for some sweet word to say,
There came upon me a great pain of care.

For how can man love beauty and yet care
For one face only more than for a day?
When all God's world is free and all maids fair
To us who live not well but as we may.
Wherefore we lie along our beds and bare
Our hearts to bitterness we may not say.

But there is one word I beg leave to say,
  Who love not heavy hearts nor any care:
Let God be thanked for madness and for May
  And for a face that is a brief while fair,
Or ever we learn, in some bright hour of day,
  What bitterness there is in love laid bare.

So let it be that when the world is bare
  And we that live can find no heart to say
Great words of God and find no heart to care
  For song, who once went singing through the day,
Yet in some wise there shall be one face fair
  Beyond all dreams we made as all men may.

Have, then, no care for aught beyond your day.
  Though all men say that age is bald and bare,
Life may be fair for one face loved in May.

RIME-ROYAL

God knows there is no comfort in sad songs
Nor any ease in bitter songs made sweet
With high, wild music of the wind that throngs
Above the thronging walkers in the street
Where men meet men and men and women meet,
Speak of light loves and part and sigh and say:
"Ah, well, 'twill serve to while the hours away!"

For life has many moods and all moods tire
Or ever the cup be drained unto the lees:
Pleasure and song and triumph and desire
And all safe comfort and all wonted ease.
And if a man sit brooding over these,
Shall he not hold, of each that bore its day:
"This, too, hath served to while the hours away"?

And if a man sit brooding over grief,
Now, surely, at the last he shall confess
(Remembering how that every pain was brief,
Midmost the limbo of life's barrenness,
And how, for every lip that he would press,
There lingered yet some savor of decay)—
"All sorrow served to while the hours away."

All beauty has some little dole of death,
All death some hope of beauty hidden there

(Howbeit before the laden west wind's breath
Are blown dead bones that moved in men whilere),
Wherefore we living die not of despair,
But turn and seek such beauty as we may,
Thinking thereof to while the hours away.

So let me sing what songs are in my heart
Before my heart's few singing days are done,
And pardon me if what I can of art
Sound only threnes and dirges 'neath the sun,
Who have but watched how all Earth's rivers run
Into a sea that is not filled for aye—
So must I choose to while the hours away.

And, also, now, if any man will read
And muse how there is beauty in sad lays
Beyond all boast of beauty that may breed
In measures made to earn the common praise,
Let me take heart for sadness of my days
And to whatever Gods will hearken, pray
My songs may serve to while some hours away.

In Quantity

HENDECASYLLABICS

All the graves of the Goths the wild world over
Speak for glory and war and love of woman;
All the runes of the Goths and all their folk-lore,
Woven ever with deeds of Thor and Odin,
Echo, gloomy and stern, full of a moaning
Wind in primitive forests, full of thunder
Rolling over stark hills, and boom of ocean
Breaking, older than pain, on broken beaches.

Sad and sodden with drink they watched the winter
Pass and heard in the night the hard wolf-howling,
Saying deep to their hearts, "Lo, as the sparrow
Flitteth into a hall and through the torch-light,
Flying but for a moment under rafters,
Then departeth anon out to the darkness,
So the life of a man cometh we know not
Whence, and like as a bird, goeth forever."

These were berserkers wild in battle, vikings
Ruddy-bearded and bold, blue-eyed and handsome,
Singing songs in the teeth of northern tempests,
Savage, passionate, pagan, meet for sagas.

All the graves of the Goths the wild world over
Speak for glory and war and love of woman.

SAPPHICS

Slowly dawn came, waking the sleeping Goddess,
Kissing open, even with lips of roses,
Eyes that trembled, half in the dream that held her
Yet with Adonis.

Then the young loves harnessed the doves, the wild-wing
Doves immortal, bound them with pearl and amber,
Making day ring loud for a sound of movement
Sweeter than bird-song.

Out of tired lips fluttered a sigh for waking,
Yet with fingers fitting the purple sandals,
All her bright breast, shaken with stormy kisses,
Flashed in the morning.

Then in some wise, like as a mist of April
Passes rainless over the rain-wet meadows,
Borne in wrought gold, wonderful, oh! and laughing,
Passed Aphrodite.

All the earth mourned bitterly for that passing,
All the sea sobbed, beaten on lonely beaches,
Yet with deep song, seeing that even heartache
Throbbed of her beauty.

But in one place something remained, a fragrance
Haunting that bed, radiant now with sunlight,
Something man might never forget forever,
Once he had known it.

Wherefore, now, let nothing be said against her,
Nothing be said, seeing that unto Lethe,
What of her fair body and grace and glory,
We shall remember.

ALCAICS

O Wind, O West Wind, singing of Hesperus,
Blow, blow again now, laden with amaranth,
  Over the place where she lies dreaming,
    Whisper and say to her words I dare not!

Bid her forsake—ah!—bid her forsake for me
Old cold delights long banished by Artemis
  Who, on far Latmus, faint with passion,
    Kisses Endymion's face in secret!

Oh, blow awake, with music æolian,
Eyes that deny me more than to sing to them!
  Breathe in that mouth desire for comfort
    Sweeter than tears on the mouths of maidens!

Saying, "He loves thee, Sappho!" and saying it
Not as with pride, but tenderly, tenderly,
  As of my heart, wherein are only
    Song and the ache of her singing beauty.

Thus, then, it may be she will remember me,
O Wind, O West Wind, sigh and remember me
  When I am gone to fields of Orcus
    Far from the sea and the sun forever!

PROPHECY

There shall be kings again to ride
  The chariots of countless wars
And build of porphyry and jade
  Vast palaces beneath the stars.

There shall be nobles proud and grim
  In insolence of blazonries,
And women beautiful for sin
  And wines of many vintages.

And time shall dance his rigadoon
  On ivory and amber dials,
And there shall be great singers then,
  And music torn from virgin viols.